

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

- 1 1. An instant messaging system comprising: an electronic assistant to handle instant
2 messages sent from a first user to an instant message program of a second user when the
3 second user is away or offline, wherein the assistant:
4 receives a first instant message from the first user;
5 in response to the first instant message, sends the first user an instant
6 message that indicates that the second user is away or offline;
7 receives a second instant message from the first user, wherein the second
8 instant message contains a request that the electronic assistant take an action related to
9 the away or offline status of the second user; and
10 in response to the request, takes the requested action.
- 1 2. The system of claim 1 wherein:
2 the requested action includes having the assistant take a message from the first user
3 for delivery to the second user;
4 the assistant, to take the requested action, takes the message from the first user for
5 delivery to the second user; and
6 the assistant forwards the message to the second user.
- 7 3. The system of claim 1 wherein:
8 the requested action includes providing the first user with information related to the
9 away or offline status of the second user; and
10 the assistant, to take the requested action, sends the first user an instant message
11 containing information related to the away or offline status of the second user.
- 12 4. The system of claim 1 wherein the assistant accesses stored information about recent
13 history of the away and/or offline status of the second user.
- 1 5. The system of claim 4 wherein:
2 the requested action includes providing the first user with information related to the

3 away or offline status of the second user;

4 the assistant, to take the requested action, sends the first user an instant message
5 containing information related to the away or offline status of the second user; and

6 the information provided to the first user that relates to the away or offline status of
7 the second user is based, at least in part, on the stored information about recent history of
8 the away and/or offline status of the second user.

1 6. The system of claim 4 wherein:

2 the requested action includes having the assistant take a message from the first user
3 for delivery to the second user;

4 the assistant, to take the requested action, takes the message from the first user for
5 delivery to the second user;

6 the assistant forwards the message to the second user; and

7 the message is forwarded based, at least in part, on the stored information about
8 recent history of the away and/or offline status of the second user.

1 7. The system of claim 1 wherein the assistant accesses stored calendar information for the
2 second user.

1 8. The system of claim 7 wherein:

2 the requested action includes providing the first user with information related to the
3 away or offline status of the second user;

4 the assistant, to take the requested action, sends the first user an instant message
5 containing information related to the away or offline status of the second user; and

6 the information provided to the first user that relates to the away or offline status of
7 the second user is based, at least in part, on the stored calendar information.

1 9. The system of claim 7 wherein:

2 the requested action includes having the assistant taking a message from the first user
3 for delivery to the second user;

4 the assistant, to take the requested action, takes the message from the first user for
5 delivery to the second user;

6 the assistant forwards the message to the second user; and
7 the message is forwarded based, at least in part, on the stored calendar information.

1 10. The system of claim 1 wherein the assistant accesses stored information about other ways
2 of contacting the second user.

1 11. The system of claim 10 wherein:
2 the requested action includes providing the first user with information related to the
3 away or offline status of the second user;
4 the assistant, to take the requested action, sends the first user an instant message
5 containing information related to the away or offline status of the second user; and
6 the information provided to the first user that relates to the away or offline status of
7 the second user is based, at least in part on the stored information about other ways of
8 contacting the second user.

1 12. The system of claim 10 wherein:
2 the requested action includes having the assistant take a message from the first user
3 for delivery to the second user;
4 the assistant, to take the requested action, takes the message from the first user for
5 delivery to the second user;
6 the assistant forwards the message to the second user; and
7 the message is forwarded based, at least in part, on the stored information about other
8 ways of contacting the second user.

1 13. The system of claim 1 wherein:
2 the requested action includes providing the first user with information related to the
3 away or offline status of the second user;
4 the assistant, to take the requested action, sends the first user an instant message
5 containing information related to the away or offline status of the second user; and
6 the information provided to the first user that relates to the away or offline status of
7 the second user is based, at least in part, on a trust level for the first user.

1 14. An electronic assistant to handle instant messages sent from a first user to an instant
2 message program of a second user when the second user is away or offline, the assistant
3 comprising:

4 a natural language interface component to perform processing on an instant
5 message to determine if the instant message is requesting that the electronic assistant take
6 an action related to the away or offline status of the second user; and

7 a response component to determine and send a response to an instant message
8 requesting that the electronic assistant take an action related to the away or offline status
9 of the second user, wherein the response is related to the requested action.

1 15. The assistant of claim 14 wherein:

2 the action includes providing the first user with information related to the away or
3 offline status of the second user;

4 the response component determines and sends a response that includes information
5 related to the away or offline status of the second user; and

6 the response component accesses stored information about recent history of the away
7 and/or offline status of the second user to determine the response that includes
8 information related to the away or offline status of the second user.

1 16. The assistant of claim 14 wherein:

2 the action includes providing the first user with information related to the away or
3 offline status of the second user;

4 the response component determines and sends a response that includes information
5 related to the away or offline status of the second user; and

6 the response component accesses stored calendar information for the second user to
7 determine the response that includes information related to the away or offline status of
8 the second user.

1 17. The assistant of claim 14 wherein:

2 the action includes providing the first user with information related to the away or
3 offline status of the second user;

4 the response component determines and sends a response that includes information

5 related to the away or offline status of the second user; and
6 the response component accesses stored information about other ways of contacting
7 the second user to determine the response that includes information related to the away or
8 offline status of the second user.

1 18. The assistant of claim 14 wherein:

2 the action includes providing the first user with information related to the away or
3 offline status of the second user;

4 the response component determines and sends a response that includes information
5 related to the away or offline status of the second user; and

6 the response that includes information related to the away or offline status of the
7 second user is based, at least in part, on a trust level for the first user.

1 19. The assistant of claim 14 wherein the action includes taking a message from the first user
2 for delivery to the second user and the assistant further comprises a message component
3 to forward a message left by the first user for delivery to the second user according to a
4 determination of when and to where the message should be forwarded for the second user
5 to receive the message.

1 20. The assistant of claim 19 wherein the message component accesses stored information
2 about recent history of the away and/or offline status of the second user to determine
3 when and to where the message left by the first user should be forwarded for the second
4 user to receive the message.

1 21. The assistant of claim 19 wherein the message component accesses stored calendar
2 information for the second user to determine when and to where the message left by the
3 first user should be forwarded for the second user to receive the message.

1 22. The assistant of claim 19 wherein the message component accesses stored information
2 about other ways of contacting the second user to determine when and to where the
3 message left by the first user should be forwarded for the second user to receive the
4 message.

1 23. A method of handling instant messages sent to an away or offline user, the method
2 comprising:
3 receiving instant messages sent to the away or offline user from a first user;
4 in response to at least one of the instant messages requesting information related to
5 the away or offline status of the away or offline user, providing, to the first user,
6 information related to the away or offline status of the away or offline user;
7 receiving a message left by the first user for delivery to the away or offline user;
8 determining when and to where the message left by the first user should be forwarded
9 for the second user to receive the message; and
10 forwarding the message according to the determination of when and to where the
11 message should be forwarded.

1 24. The method of claim 23 further comprising accessing stored information about recent
2 history of the away and/or offline status of the away or offline user to determine the
3 information, to be provided to the first user, that relates to the away or offline status of
4 the away or offline user.

1 25. The method of claim 23 further comprising accessing stored calendar information for the
2 away or offline user to determine the information, to be provided to the first user, that
3 relates to the away or offline status of the away or offline user.

1 26. The method of claim 23 further comprising accessing stored information about other
2 ways of contacting the away or offline user to determine the information, to be provided
3 to the first user, that relates to the away or offline status of the away or offline user.

1 27. The method of claim 23 further comprising determining the information, to be provided
2 to the first user, that relates to the away or offline status of the away or offline user based,
3 at least in part, on a trust level for the first user.

1 28. The method of claim 23 further comprising accessing stored information about recent
2 history of away and/or offline status of the away or offline user to determine when and to

3 where the message left by the first user should be forwarded for the second away or
4 offline user to receive the message.

1 29. The method of claim 23 further comprising accessing stored calendar information for the
2 away or offline user to determine when and to where the message left by the first user
3 should be forwarded for the away or offline user to receive the message.

1 30. The method of claim 23 further comprising accessing stored information about other
2 ways of contacting the away or offline user to determine when and to where the message
3 left by the first user should be forwarded for the away or offline user to receive the
4 message.